**Homily** **for the 2nd Sunday of Advent**

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       This is a wonderful time of year, of preparing to give gifts and receive as well. Many of you by now have begun to make a list of Christmas gifts and make to-do list for Christmas events.

        Then, when you see the bottom line of what these gifts and events will cost, you may begin to check the lists again and remove something on the lists. This is a season of waiting, preparation, and action.

        In the Gospel today, we hear the voice of John the Baptist, and he offers us a to-do list for the preparation of the coming of Christ. He tells us, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low.”

        Like the prophet Isaiah foretold, Christ is about to enter the human history. Knowing Christ is coming, we’d better get ready!

        Let’s look at the historical background. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea; Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee. It was the civil authority.

        Tiberius was the emperor of Rome, Pontius Pilate was the local king, appointed by the emperor, and third in line was Herod. The Gospel also mentions Anna and Caiaphas as the high priests. They were all important people in the society.

        Then, far from all these important people and civil authority, the Gospel names a nobody, John the Baptist. No one had known him. But, people began to listen to him. He is preaching that God is about to enter the human history.

        People had been waiting for the Messiah for a long time to come and save them. Then, finally, they hear, “Prepare the way of the Lord. The time is at hand.” John was a voice of crying out in the desert, and proclaimed the Good News to make ready.

        Away from the noise and distractions of daily life, from the desert, not the middle of the city, a voice is coming. “Prepare!”

        This is a feature of Advent, the ‘desert,’ where is very quiet place apart from the politics, economy, and disputes that surround us all year long. In this time of year, there are too much noise and distractions.

        We need to move away from disorder to prepare the way of the Lord. In the desert, John offers us a to-do list for the preparing. It is all about a repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

        The Hebrew word ‘repentance’ means ‘to return,’ or ‘to feel sorrow.’ And, in Greek it means ‘different from the former thought,’ or ‘a change of mind accompanied by regret and change of conduct.’

        So, John the Baptist tells us that the first step is repentance, turning our hearts and minds away from sin, indifference, and unbelief. It is time to make a space in each day to be with the Lord and to renew our faith.

        This kind of preparation is not found at the shopping mall or gift shop. It is the much deeper preparation of our life and soul.

        John speaks about preparing the way for the Lord, in terms of getting rid of the bumps and hols in our life to make a straight path for the Lord. In this crowded season, we need to take away one or two stones or boulders that block the full flow of grace into our life.

        Maybe, it would be wonderful if the joy and peace of Christmas came with just putting up decorations, turning on a Christmas music, and stringing out the lights. Plug it all in and Christmas happens. But, Christmas that happens so easily disappears just as easily.

        In the middle of this crowded season, the voice of John the Baptist reminds us that we should be getting ready not just for another holiday season, but to renew our lives. He reminds us that we should change and return to the Lord.

        We need to prepare not for temporary seasonal cheer, but for deep joy in the Lord that comes from experiencing release from sin and new life in Christ. Then, Christmas will be not just a holiday season, but a healing season as well.

        It’s now the second week of Advent. God wants to make our lives smoother. He wants to help us move mountain of worry and anxiety. He wants to fill our emotional valleys with the peace and happiness of His presence as we face life’s enormous challenges and trials.

        Remember God wants to enter into our lives to be with us. That’s why His name is Emmanuel, “God is with us.”